

**AGENDA SUMMARY
TAVARES CITY COUNCIL
8/21/2019**

AGENDA TAB NO.: 12

SUBJECT TITLE: Concept for Primitive Camping (Community Services)

OBJECTIVE:

To explore the idea of creating primitive campsites at the Tavares Nature Park.

SUMMARY:

Previously, at the February 6, 2019 City Council meeting, Councilmember Roy Stevenson indicated a desire to explore a primitive camping opportunity at the Tavares Nature Park. Staff has conducted an initial overview and offers the following report on key points as it relates to primitive camping:

§ Grant Conditions – The FCT grant used to purchase the land for the park does allow for primitive camping. Staff would need to submit in writing an official request to amend the park management plan to include such an activity.

§ Park Improvements and Preparations – It is recommended that areas for primitive camping be identified in locations that would not interfere with established habitat including potential gopher tortoises, the Rosemary Scrub and other natural vegetation. The estimated cost to properly map out these locations, clear the land, install amenities such as garbage receptacles, a picnic table and fire rings, and sign the site with rules that address fires, noise, emergency notifications, etc. is estimated to be around \$4,500. Another option would be to engage the services of the Boy Scouts or the Girl Scouts which could reduce this cost.

§ Current Primitive Camping Inventory – To our knowledge, the closest park that offers primitive camping is located at Lake Louisa State Park in Clermont. Others include Rock Springs Run State Reserve in Sorrento and Wekiwa Springs State Park in Apopka, but no other parks in Lake County offer primitive campsites for their user groups.

§ Annual Cost to Maintain – It is estimated that the maintenance cost would be limited to cleaning up garbage left behind or in the receptacles, grading/cleaning sites with excessive campfire/charcoal overflows, fire ring repairs, etc. Other costs would include rules enforcement upon receiving complaints or citizen concerns, as well as liability insurance for the increased level of service.

§ Issues to Consider – Staff contacted the Florida State Parks organization and the local parks that offer primitive camping in the region to ascertain what issues they have come across and offer a highlight of their responses:

- o All of the State Parks that offer primitive camping are monitored with park rangers and charge a small fee for the campsites.
- o Lake Louisa Park Manager stated their biggest issue is from campers cutting down trees and other brush to use for firewood.
- o Fear of attracting a large homeless population was the reason that Lake Griffin State Park in Leesburg did not create primitive campsites.
- o The biggest issue regarding primitive campsites in both the Lower Wekiwa

Preserve and Rock Springs Run Reserve State Parks is the trash that sometimes get left behind and outsiders using the primitive toilet facilities as they canoe or paddle through the areas.

- o Several rangers mentioned that all their sites are equipped with food lockers as a protection against bears and other wildlife.
- o The Wekiva River Basin State Parks Manager did mention that bears are a concern, however they have more issues with bears in their developed campsites verses the primitive ones because those sites have more food.

OPTIONS:

1. Approve staff to further explore and implement a primitive camping opportunity at the Tavares Nature Park
2. Do not approve

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That council discuss and provide direction to staff

FISCAL IMPACT:

\$4500.00 would need to be appropriated in either fy2020 or fy2021

LEGAL SUFFICIENCY:

meets sufficiency